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ABSTRACT

In 1992, North Shore Community College received a grant to develop a multimedia program for literature instruction based on Homer's "Odyssey." Rather than providing the text of the work, the program, "Journey Home," provides access to a wide array of related materials related to the "Odyssey," including 150 excerpts from critical essays, articles, and poetry; 30 video segments; 15 music excerpts; and 100 art works and photographs. The main menu provides students with the option to click on mythology, religion and the gods, Odysseus' journey, characters in the poem, astronomy, Homer and his world, craftsmanship and technology, archeology, sources and language, and a help section. The program was pilot-tested in two World Literature classes, one using the program in a lab only, while the other used it in both the classroom and lab. Observations based on the pilot testing included the following: (1) students expressed a desire for more access to labs; (2) instructors found that students were tempted to play with the program during lectures and students in the lab only class had some trouble navigating the program; (3) the program was most effective when specific assignments were given, rather than allowing students to wander through the material; and (4) instructors found that the computers tended to block their view of students and that helping students with computers during class was disruptive. In general, the response to the program was enthusiastic and the academic performance of students using the program improved. (KP)

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Journey Home: A Multimedia Work in Progress on Homer's Odyssey

by

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January 15, 1994

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Journey Home : A Multimedia Work in Progress on Homer's *Odyssey*

by Sandy Stalker and Terri Whitney

In 1992 North Shore Community College received a FIPSE grant to develop and pilot in the classroom a multimedia program on Homer's *Odyssey* entitled *Journey Home.* The goal of this project was to demonstrate a new way of teaching literature using state-of-the-art technology.

The project team was comprised of the director, the principal designer, and the media specialist. The project director, whose job at the College is Director of Educational Technology, oversaw all activities, prepared budgets, wrote reports, and co-ordinated the work of the team, the secretarial support, and the evaluators. The principal designer and content specialist was an English professor with over twenty years teaching experience. She compiled and edited the text, video, art, and music and worked with the media specialist to create the screen design, including selecting visuals for all menu screens. The media specialist scanned in the art work, entered the video, music, and text, designed the map and some of the menu screens, and linked the words in bold in the text to the appropriate art, music, or video, using the programming language LINGO for Macromind Director.

Journey Home is not an electronic text of Homer's *Odyssey.* Rather, it is a program with a wide array of material relating to Homer's *Odyssey.* A single background lecture only touches on the highlights of such topics as the Trojan War, the archaeological digs of Heinrich Schliemann, or the influences that the *Odyssey* has had on other works of art, music, and literature. However, the multimedia program provides easy access to a vast amount of information allowing students to fill in gaps in their learning; it also encourages active learning and responds to diverse learning styles. By allowing students choice regarding their path through the material, the principal designer hoped that students who might otherwise have only a passing interest in the work would enter the world of the *Odyssey* with enthusiasm and curiosity. Moreover,the designer hoped that students would leave their study of the *Odyssey* with a more

sophisticated understanding of the work than after the usual series of lecture/discussion classes.

NSCC completed the initial pilot of *Journey Home* in the classroom in December 1993, and the qualitative evaluation results indicate that the essays of the multimedia students displayed a significantly greater array of knowledge and scope of information and a significantly greater use of secondary sources. Multimedia students also demonstrated a slightly better conceptual knowledge of the *Odyssey* and were more accurate in documenting their sources. Here is an example of anecdotal information: On the last day of class the instructor asked both the multimedia pilot class and the control class to discuss the work that had the greatest impact on them. In the multimedia class the weakest student chose the *Odyssey* citing *Journey Home* as the reason because it made it much easier for him to understand and become interested in the work. In the pilot class, however, the strongest student in an aside commented that the *Odyssey* was the most difficult work because it required background information in history, mythology, and archaeology, for example, to be fully understood and appreciated. As this is just the sort of information contained in the *Journey Home* program, this remark has made the designers optimistic that they are on the right track.

Here is what is included in the work in progress version of *Journey Home:*

TEXT

The text portion of *Journey Home* is not comprised of the *Odyssey* itself but instead consists of approximately 150 excerpts from critical essays, newspaper and magazine articles as well as a selection of poems. The average length of the critical essay excerpts is three pages with the longest ones rarely exceeding five pages.

VIDEO

There are 30 video segments of approximately two to five minutes each. When segments over ten minutes were required, they were divided into two parts.

MUSIC

There are 15 music excerpts from six classical and popular works related to the *Odyssey.*

ART

There are 100 art works from the classical period to the twentieth century on subjects related to the *Odyssey* as well as a few photographs of sites mentioned in the *Odyssey* in the program.

OTHER

There is also a Help section, a map of the Mediterranean world, and a glossary containing an explanation of people, places, and objects mentioned in the *Odyssey* as well as vocabulary words which might not likely be in the lexicon of many community college students.

There are two sections of the program the designers thought would be ready this year but were not. The first is a notes page, which allows students to type comments or questions and print them out; the second is a timeline which records a number of notable events relating to the *Odyssey* in history, archaeology, language development, art, and literature from the time of the Trojan War until the twentieth century.

In designing the interface of *Journey Home*, the designers aimed for the following:

SIMPLE, UNCLUTTERED SCREENS

The problem here was that sometimes the designers needed lengthy information on the screen such as a list of related art works; they had to choose between limiting this list and risking alienating the user because of long lists and also creating a somewhat aesthetically unappealing look. They decided to preserve the content and hope that students would not recoil at a few long lists. They have some ideas now, however, about how to change this. For example, at a recent visit to the Washington, D.C., Holocaust Museum where they viewed the multimedia programs available, they noticed that when a number of photos on a subject are available, rather than listing each one on the screen, the viewer just clicks on the photo icon and the entire series of photos pops up one at a time with forward and back buttons controlled by the viewer.

NOT TOO MANY LAYERS OF INFORMATION

The reason for this was so that students would not become lost in hyperspace. However, the problem here was that one of the advantages, indeed main points, of a multimedia program is to allow students to explore topics in depth and to wander from one related topic to another through links. The designers provided as many layers as possible but tried to help students avoid being lost in hyperspace by allowing them to exit to the main menu at any time by an "E" key command. Also a "back" button on each screen returns students back one screen at a time until eventually they reach the main menu. In addition, at any time students may type "H" on the keyboard to return to the Help section.

COLORFUL SCREENS BUT NOT OVERDONE AND DISTRACTING

It is tempting to go beserk here.

MOST EFFECTIVE TEXT FONT

The challenge here was to select one which was easy to read but small enough to maximize amount of material on the screen(s). The problem the designers ran into here is that the text under photos had to be quite small to fit in the designated photo area. Thus they kept the amount of text there to a minimum, and for longer captions they used audio. One of the main problems with text was that when the designers transferred it into the program, spacing went haywire; as a result they had to re-edit all text after it was imported. This problem will, they are told, be taken care of with the new Macromind program.

APPROPRIATE USE OF "BELLS AND WHISTLES"

The designers tried to use these where it improves understanding and makes the material more interesting but not just for the sake of using them. For example,the designers used background music only during the title screen; otherwise music occurs only when the student clicks on a music excerpt.

LIMITING REGULAR TEXT TO FIVE PAGES

On the advice of other multimedia designers and the outside consultant for the project, the designers made only a few exceptions here. For many, lengthy text on a computer screen makes concentration difficult.

LIMITING VIDEO SEGMENTS TO FIVE OR SIX MINUTES

In the event of longer segments , the designers separated them into two videos.

Students using *Journey Home* in this initial work in progress stage first saw the title screen, heard background music and saw a button leading them to the Help section if they wished. If they did not need to view this section, they could click anywhere on the screen to see the Main Menu (see figure 1). If a student clicks on a topic, he/she will see a list of subtopics:

Mythology	(Subtopics: General; Jason and the Argonauts; Orestes Myth)
Religion and the Gods	(Subtopics: General; Athena; Hermes; Poseidon; Zeus)
Odysseus' Journey	(Subtopics: General; Troy; Ismaros-Cicones; Lotus -eaters; Cyclops; Aeolia; Laestrygonians; Aiaia-Circe; Hades; Sirens;Scylla; Charybdis; Thrinacia; Ogygia-Calypso; Scheria-Phaeacians; Ithaca)
Characters	(Subtopics: Agamemnon; Nestor; Odysseus; Penelope; Telemachus)
Astronomy	(No subtopics)
Homer and His World	(Subtopics: General; Biography of Homer; Daily Life in the World of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* : general, role of the bard, role of the sea, role of the soothsayers, role of women; Customs and Beliefs: hospitality and gift-giving, marriage, beliefs regarding the dead; History: general, Mycenae, Dark Ages, 8th Century, towns and dwellings)
Craftsmanship and Technology	(Subtopics: General; Maritime Technology)
Archaeology	(Subtopics: Discovery of Troy; Pylos; Treasures; Dorpfeld; Schliemann)
Sources and Language	(Subtopics: Authorship Question; Establishment of the Text; Greek Language; The *Odyssey* Fact or Fiction:; Sources; Translations)

Figure One

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Composition and Style	(Subtopics: Composition: General; Oral Tradition and Techniques; Style: General)
Related Art	(Subtopics for text: General; Aiolia; Athena; Circe; Cyclops; Hades; Ithaca; Poseidon; Scheria; Sirens; Scylla)
Related Music	(Text not yet available; currently there are excerpts from six works related to the *Odyssey* including ones by Bowie; Faure; Monteverdi; Offenbach; Tippett and one by Clapton and Sharp performed by Cream
Related Literature	(Subtopics: General; Drama; Film; Fiction; Parable; Parody; Poetry)

Then if the student clicks on a subtopic, he/she sees a list of authors of critical essays related to the subtopic (see figure 2). When the student clicks on an author's name, the essay excerpt appears on the right side of the screen. In the essay, words printed in bold have links. When a student clicks on a bold word, he/she will see a list of all video, still art, music, and literature related to that word printed on the left side of the screen. In addition, when appropriate, the map and/or glossary button at the bottom of the screen will light up. A student may then choose a video, still art work, music excerpt, or related literary work to examine or look at the map or in the glossary. The videos and art work are shown on the lower left corner of the screen (except for a few art works which are full screen). (See figure 3). Some art works have only a brief printed caption; others have longer captions which are narrated. The glossary provides a brief definition or explanation and the map highlights various places mentioned in the *Odyssey*. If a student clicks on any location printed in white, he/she will hear a brief explanation of the significance of that place in the *Odyssey*.

In the completed version of *Journey Home* the design team plans to make the following modifications in the program:

TEXT and LINKS

The designers will add text and links which, because of memory limitations, they were unable to include this time. These include approximately 50 articles , 20 poems, several short works

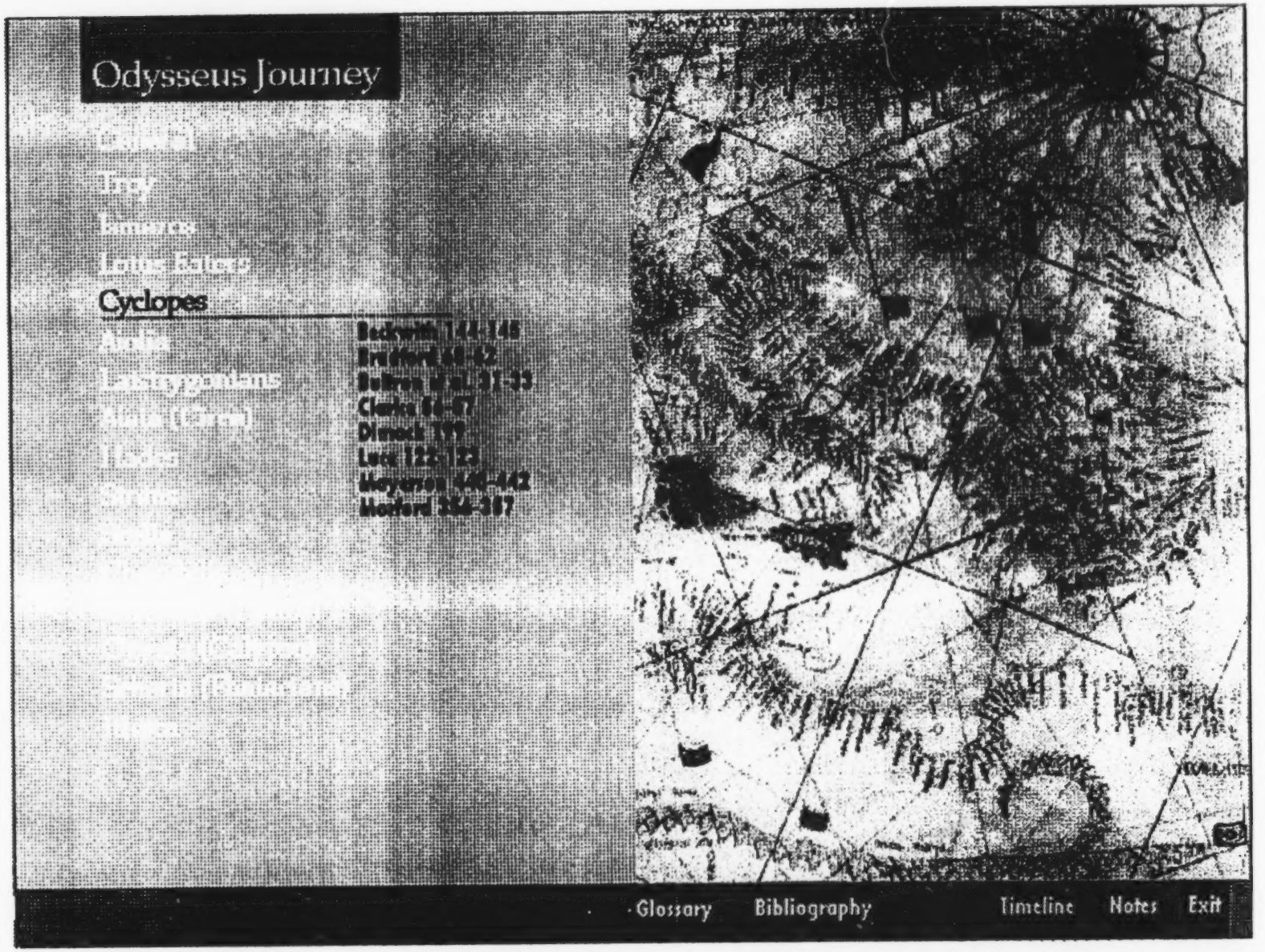

Figure Two

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General

Links

- Homer-History/Greek
- Homer - Biography/Greek
- Apotheosis of Homer/Hafner 230
- Bust of Homer/Bloom Cover
- Homer (Coin-los)/Kraay 116
- Kirk 271-272
- Lattimore 13+
- Levi 57-59

Journey General (Bradford viii-x and 37)

...[I]t is proof not only of the artistry of the *Odyssey* but of its incredible vitality, that one can still care in the day and age whether any of it is true or not. It must be remembered that at the time when Homer wrote, sea travel was as exciting, dangerous, and almost unbelievable as space travel today. The modern astronaut is in much the same position as the early man who first set off to sail beyond the confines of his native shore (Bradford viii).

...The *Odyssey* has been a "classic" since the fifth century B.C. Even then people were disputing *its truth and its origins*. There were some who said that it was the record of a real voyage, and others who regarded it as no more than a fairy-tale. Strobe, one of the first great geographers, considered that Homer's account was factual. In his seventeen-volume *Geography* he indicated the dwelling place of the Sirens with just as much confidence as he did the capes, harbors, and cities of the Mediterranean. The truth, as nearly always, probably lies somewhere in the middle; between the extremes of those who regarded the *Odyssey* as gospel truth, and those who dismissed it as altogether fictitious (Bradford ix).

...I [Bradford] base my own "foolishness" on the work of Heinrich Schliemann above all others. In the early nineteenth century, when this great German archaeologist was born, it was quite commonly accepted among scholars that the city of Troy had never existed. Schliemann did not believe them. Taking the works of Homer as his guide, he set out and found the ancient city—in exactly the place where classical authorities had once stated that it used to exist...(Bradford ix).

Glossary Bibliography Timeline Notes Exit

Figure Three

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of fiction and a few excerpts from longer fictional works. Also, they will add any new text the principal designer selects. In addition, the designers would like to enable students to print out any text.

VIDEO

The designers will add video which they were unable to include, and they will trim existing video.

They will possibly use a larger video window if technology permits (The new Macromind program may allow them to do this, though this would probably necessitate a re-designing of the interface.)

MUSIC

The designers will add explanatory text and librettos or lyrics to music excerpts and add any additional music excerpts. In addition, they may add video to the Monteverdi excerpts.

ART-AUDIO

The designers will consider adding audio to all art descriptions. (Ideally they would offer a choice of audio or text for all art.)

TRACKING

The designers will try to embed tracking to allow them to keep a record of paths which students navigate. This will enable them to see which areas of the program are used frequently and which are rarely used.

NOTES

The designers would like to include a note pad which will appear next to the text so that students may take notes while reading. Also they would like to allow students to save notes to a disk or to the hard drive and to share notes with other students and the instructor.

GLOSSARY

The designers will add glossary entries where necessary (according to students' suggestions this semester.)

NAVIGATIONAL MAP

The designers will add a script navigational map with a key command for entry. Students will be able to click on a title/author on the map for immediate access and/or they can ask that their current location be highlighted so that they can find their position in the overall program.

SCREEN DIRECTIONS

The designers will add screen directions for each screen.

HELP

The designers will make the HELP section interactive.

MAPS

The designers will add more locations.

TIMELINE

The designers will add the timeline that will, if possible, include a highlighting feature so that students can highlight certain topics . For example, pressing the archaeology highlight button would reveal in bold all events on the timeline relating to archaeology .

MAIN MENU BUTTON

The designers will possibly add a button for RETURN TO MAIN MENU so students do not have to use a key command; this depends on how successful the key command "E" is in this semester's trial.

AUTHORING SOFTWARE AND DATABASE

The design team will order the new Macromind program which will make text handling much smoother. (The current Macromind program allows only 24 channels; this means a maximum of 24 spaces at a time for buttons, graphics, and similar features .The new Macromind program may increase this and will make other things such as a larger video window possible.)

Finally, the designers will change to a database which allows them to search by author, media type, title, or cast member using Aldus Fetch. They learned the hard way how important it is to keep all media types in a structure that allows access in a variety of ways. Aldus Fetch will also allow them to produce an interactive visual storyboard database so that they can call up all art, music, video, and text in a small icon, then click on it to make it large.

CURRENT PILOT OF JOURNEY HOME IN CLASS

Journey Home was tested in two World Literature classes this semester, one taught by the principal designer and one by a colleague. The principal designer also taught a control class. In the colleague's class students used *Journey Home* in a lab setting only, and in the principal designer's class students used the program both in the classroom and in the lab.

In the control class, for example, students spent half an hour during two classes watching the film *Search for Ulysses,* a modern re-enactment of Odysseus' journey. In the multimedia class, however, students took 15-20 minutes during two class periods to explore topics in the multimedia program which were related to the day's discussion. Specifically, students could read from a choice of essay excerpts on Homer or on the discovery of Troy by Heinrich Schliemann, or they could view videos related to these topics. If the notepad had been working, students could have typed comments, observations, or answers to questions on the program and printed them out at the end of class. After the 15-20 minute exploration, groups of students discussed their observations and questions, or the class as a whole discussed the multimedia information.

The multimedia class was equipped with18 Macintosh Centris 650 computers, earphones, and printers. The lab was equipped with six

Macintosh Centris 650 computers, earphones, and printers. Each week, students received sheets with recommended topics to explore in the multimedia program in the lab. The sheets also offered suggestions on where in the multimedia program to find information on each topic. Additionally, the sheets contained questions regarding the student's experience using the program on a particular day. Students ultimately compiled a journal on several topics from the entire list.

In addition to the journal, students in the multimedia class wrote a 750-1,000 word paper on one of several topics provided using *Journey Home*, the text, and any library resources. Students were encouraged to seek out texts, videos, CDs (including program notes and/or libretto) if the excerpts which appeared in the multimedia program were insufficient or because they were interested in further exploration. Students in the control class also wrote a research paper using books, articles, and videotapes put on reserve in the library and media center.

Though we have not yet completed the evaluation of the *Journey Home* pilot, during the semester the instructor/principal designer recorded a number of student responses as well as her own observations. Some of these were:

1. Students had two complaints about the program. First, they wanted more access to the labs (e.g. Friday nights and 3- 7 on weekdays) During the pilot, the lab was open 8 to 3 M-F and 7-10 M-Th . Also they wished more of the links had been working. (Only about 1/4 of the links were connected in this early version. As noted, all links will be connected in the final version.)
2. Once the students turned on the program in class, it was tempting for them to play with the program instead of turning their attention back to the class.
3. Students in the principal designer's multimedia class navigated relatively easily through the program. However, some students in her colleague's class, who used the program only in the lab, had some questions about navigation even though they had been given a demonstration in the classroom. As a result, the principal designer and her colleague concluded that it would be best if someone familiar with the program could be present in the lab the first time each student used the program.

4. The program was most effective when the principal designer gave a specific assignment rather than offer students 15 minutes to wander through one or more essays on a topic under discussion in the class on a particular day. For example, for the class covering Telemachus' journey to visit Nestor and Menelaus, students were asked to view the map and find Ithaca, Pylos , and Sparta. Then they read essays on hospitality in the *Odyssey* and followed any links they wished. For another class they were asked to read an essay in the Trojan War Saga section, following any links, and then to discuss the role of Helen in the Trojan War Saga. Once the principal designer began using these specific assignments in the multimedia program in the class, discussion was lively, and everyone, even the usually quiet students, participated. In the control class the usually talkative students contributed to the discussion, but it was difficult to engage the others.

5. Though the principal designer remains most enthusiastic about multimedia in the classroom, she was for a while more relaxed and comfortable in the control class. This was obviously partly because she was accustomed to the approach in the control class, but this also could be for the following reasons:

. The control class meets immediately following the multimedia class and she felt more polished in her second presentation of the day's assignment.

. The control class has a more intimate feel to it because no computers are blocking the instructor's line of vision to the students. (The instructor did stand at the side of the room, but still there was an awkwardness about the arrangement.)

. There was no need in the control class for the instructor to worry about the program working or to spend time darting from desk to desk helping students with computer problems which, though not frequent, did occur and were disruptive.

Thus, although the first version of *Journey Home* incorporated only a

portion of the links and features which comprised the original plan, the designers were able to complete enough to use in the classroom as a trial. Because of the size of the program, the technical design and implementation was much more demanding than anyone on the team had anticipated. Had the media specialist not been so willing to work far beyond his contracted time, the program would not have been ready in any form for the classroom. However, although the program was incomplete and the sizes of the control and multimedia classes were small, the response of those students who did participate was most enthusiastic. Furthermore, the academic performance of students of all abilities, but especially the weaker ones, improved as a result.